



Evaluation Brief #2: Does Paths to QUALITY™ Produce Quality Care and Education for Indiana’s Young Children?

What is Paths to QUALITY™?

Paths to QUALITY™ was created in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 2000 to help parents identify and select quality child care and to recognize providers who work to achieve higher-quality care, beyond minimum state licensing requirements. In 2008, Paths to QUALITY was introduced statewide as a voluntary system for licensed child care centers, licensed family child care homes, and unlicensed registered child care ministries.

The goals of Paths to QUALITY are to:

- » improve child care quality
- » recognize providers for their quality achievements
- » provide a tool for parents to use to select high-quality child care
- » support better development for children birth to 5 years

The four-level Paths to QUALITY rating system has a “building block” structure¹. Each level has quality criteria that must be met. To advance, the provider must meet all standards for the new level and also maintain the required standards for lower levels. As providers take steps to improve quality, they progress toward Level 4 – *accreditation* – recognized nationally as the highest standard of child care quality.

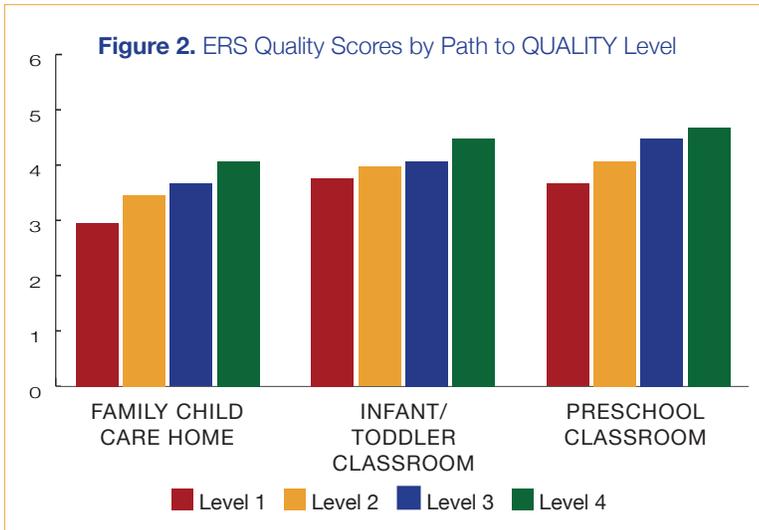
Figure 1. Paths to QUALITY building block levels



Purdue University Research on Paths to QUALITY

The state of Indiana contracted with Purdue University to evaluate the first three years of Paths to QUALITY, from 2008 to 2011. This research/policy brief highlights key findings from the Purdue research regarding the quality ratings and children’s development. See other briefs in this series for in-depth information about the Purdue evaluation research.





Do Path to QUALITY ratings give parents valid information about child care quality?

- » The Purdue researchers found that Paths to QUALITY ratings provided trustworthy information about child care quality, when compared with research-validated measures.
- » Providers at higher Paths to QUALITY levels displayed more positive interactions with children.
- » Level 3 and 4 providers were rated significantly higher than Level 1 providers in overall caregiver sensitivity and positive interactions.
- » As Paths to QUALITY levels increase, so does overall child care quality for infant-toddler and preschool classrooms, as well as in family child care homes.
- » Note that quality levels for all providers are consistently higher for providers progressing from Level 1 through Level 4. (See Figure 2.)

Does Paths to QUALITY make a difference in children’s development?

- » It is too early to tell if Paths to QUALITY will result in better development or more advanced school readiness for Indiana’s children. More time is needed for Paths to QUALITY to mature, and more extensive evaluation, including longitudinal research that follows children over several years, will answer questions about Paths to QUALITY’s impact on children’s development.

Does child care quality impact children’s development?

- » YES! In this research, higher quality child care, especially more supportive and stimulating adult-child interactions, was associated with advanced social, language, and cognitive development for both infants/toddlers and preschoolers.

FOR INFANTS/TODDLERS:

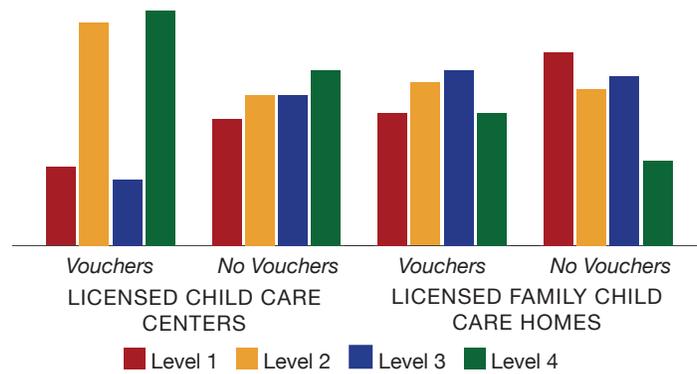
- » When child care quality was higher, infants/toddlers displayed higher levels of social competence.
- » When caregivers’ interactions with children were more positive and responsive, infants/toddlers’ cognitive and language scores were higher.

FOR PRESCHOOLERS:

- » When caregivers were rated higher on the Language/Reasoning portion of the global quality rating scale, preschoolers displayed greater language ability.
- » When caregivers were rated higher on the Parents/Staff portion of the global quality rating scale, preschoolers displayed less anxiety and aggression.
- » When caregivers interacted with children more positively, preschoolers displayed higher levels of social competence and greater language ability.



Figure 3. Percent of children receiving child care vouchers by Path to QUALITY level



Do children at all income and parent education levels have access to quality child care?

- » Yes! Parents’ income and education level did not affect children’s access to high quality care. Significant numbers of Indiana low-income children using federally-funded child care assistance vouchers were gaining access to child care at the highest quality levels. See Figure 3.
- » Within the evaluation sample, children using financial assistance vouchers were most likely to be found in child care at Level 4 or at Level 2.

Moving forward with Paths to QUALITY: Recommendations

The Purdue research revealed early Paths to QUALITY successes in improving child care quality:

- » Observations showed that child care providers participating in Paths to QUALITY were offering higher quality in the following areas:
 - ✓ *Parents and staff:* Provisions for parents and staff, staff cooperation, supervision, and evaluation of staff.
 - ✓ *Interactions:* Child supervision, discipline strategies, teacher-child and child-child interactions.
 - ✓ *Language and reasoning:* Amount and types of books accessible to the children, children’s communication in the classroom, how children use language to develop reasoning skills.
 - ✓ *Program structure:* Classroom schedule, free play and group time activities, and provisions for children with special needs.

» The evaluation also revealed areas for improvement:

- ✓ *Adult-child interactions:* that support children’s learning and well-being,
- ✓ *Space and furnishing:* Small and large motor play equipment, developmentally appropriate furnishings, room arrangement, and child-related displays in the classroom.
- ✓ *Health & safety practices:* Cleaning procedures for meals, snacks, and diapering, as well as safety practices and personal care routines.
- ✓ *Learning activities:* Use of early math, science, nature, literacy, and blocks activities.

Conclusions

Paths to QUALITY is an effective tool for parents to make child care decisions based on quality. The Paths to QUALITY levels give a valid picture of quality differences in child care centers, child care ministries, and family child care homes. Quality in some areas—adult-child interactions, learning activities, health practices, and space and furnishing—could be improved by strengthening Paths to QUALITY standards and assessments. Children from low-income homes have access to high quality care within the Paths to QUALITY system. Therefore, high quality care should result in better school readiness for those at-risk for early school failure. More research is needed to determine the impact of Paths to QUALITY on the development and school readiness of Indiana’s children.

The Purdue Research

Purdue University completed independent assessments of quality using research-validated measures in a statewide random sample of 312 licensed child care center classrooms, registered child care ministry classrooms, and licensed family child care homes. The Purdue team also interviewed more than 1800 parents and 270 child care providers, and completed developmental assessments with more than 550 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in Paths to QUALITY centers and homes. The research took place between March, 2009 and June, 2011.

The Purdue evaluation research focused on the following questions:

1. Are child care providers of all types entering the voluntary Paths to QUALITY system? Do providers understand the system?
2. What are the incentives for providers to enroll? What are the barriers?
3. Do child care providers move to higher Paths to QUALITY levels after enrolling in the system?
4. Are providers aware of available training/technical assistance (T/TA) resources to help them increase Paths to QUALITY levels, and do they use them? Does T/TA help providers advance their Paths to QUALITY levels?
5. When providers attain higher Paths to QUALITY levels, does this result in higher quality care, as assessed using research-validated measures?
6. Are children who are placed with providers who have achieved higher Paths to QUALITY levels developing more optimally than children placed with providers having lower Paths to QUALITY levels?
7. Are parents of Indiana infants, toddlers, and preschool children aware of and do they understand the Paths to QUALITY system? Does the Paths to QUALITY system affect parents' child care decisions?

¹ QRIS National Learning Network, Glossary of Terms, <http://qrisnetwork.org/glossary>.

This research-policy brief was written by Treshawn Anderson and James Elicker at Purdue University. It is one in a series available on the Purdue Center for Families website (www.cfs.purdue.edu/cff) under "Publications."

1. Evaluation Brief #1: Key Findings
2. Evaluation Brief #2: Does Paths to QUALITY™ Produce Quality Care and Education for Indiana's Young Children?
3. Evaluation Brief #3: Does Paths to QUALITY™ Benefit Indiana's Child Care Providers?
4. Evaluation Brief #4: Does Paths to QUALITY™ Help Indiana Parents Find Quality Child Care?

For more detailed information about the methods, measures, and results, refer to the Paths to QUALITY Final Evaluation Report (2011) also on the Center for Families website.

For more information about Paths to QUALITY, visit the Paths to QUALITY website: www.in.gov/fssa/2554.htm.

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